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## Report of the 2020 Social Forum\*

### *Summary*

In accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 41/24, the Social Forum was held in Geneva on 8 and 9 October 2020. Participants considered good practices, success stories, lessons learned and current challenges in combating poverty and inequalities. The present report contains a summary of the discussions, conclusions and recommendations of the Forum.

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\* The annex to the present report is being issued without formal editing, in the language of submission only.



## I. Introduction

1. The Human Rights Council, in its resolution 41/24, reaffirmed the Social Forum as a unique space for interactive dialogue between the United Nations human rights machinery and various stakeholders, including civil society and grass-roots organizations.<sup>1</sup>
2. The 2020 Social Forum was held in Geneva on 8 and 9 October 2020. It was focused on good practices, success stories, lessons learned and current challenges in combating poverty and inequalities. The President of the Council appointed the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, Vaqif Sadiqov, and the Permanent Representative of Mongolia to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, Purevsuren Lundeg, as the Co-Chair-Rapporteurs of the Forum.
3. The programme of work was prepared under the guidance of the Co-Chair-Rapporteurs, with input from the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights and other relevant stakeholders. The present report contains a summary of the proceedings, conclusions and recommendations of the Forum. The list of participants is contained in the annex.

## II. Opening of the Social Forum

4. Mr. Sadiqov recalled that the Social Forums held from 2000 to 2009 had been focused on challenges relating to poverty. As the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had increased global poverty for the first time since 1998 and pushed more than 100 million people into extreme poverty, the discussion of poverty was timely. He provided examples of initiatives by Azerbaijan that had reduced the poverty rate from 49 per cent in 2001 to 5 per cent in 2020. In the context of the pandemic, and upon the initiative of the Azerbaijani presidency, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries had established a task force to put in place a database of humanitarian and medical needs of the Movement's member States, and had gained the support of 135 Member States of the United Nations to convene the special session of the General Assembly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Azerbaijan, in its national capacity, had donated 10 million dollars to the World Health Organization to support the most affected of the Movement's member States.
5. Mr. Lundeg recalled how inequality had been an underlying theme of the Social Forum between 2010 and 2019. Issues discussed had included obstacles to realizing the right to development and inequalities among countries, such as climate change and lack of access to medicines. Previous Forums had addressed inequalities within countries and the rights of groups in focus, including older persons, persons with disabilities, children and youth, and persons with communicable diseases. He shared good practices from Mongolia, where poverty had declined with economic growth. Challenges existed as economic growth had been driven mostly by the mining sector, which was not inclusive or stable, and growth had slowed down in recent years. However, the Government was determined to fight poverty, especially through a national plan to reduce poverty to 20 per cent by 2024. International cooperation and solidarity were key to advancing transformative development and to building partnerships to fight poverty and inequalities at all levels.
6. The President of the Human Rights Council, Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger, described the Social Forum as an important meeting that brought together Member States, civil society organizations, grass-roots organizations, activists, academics and, above all, the rights holders themselves. Poverty and inequalities impeded the enjoyment of socioeconomic rights and compounded and exacerbated the denial of other rights. The Council had adopted resolutions on extreme poverty, foreign debt, the right to food, social protection and related issues. In 2020, the Council had put the fight against inequalities at the centre of its work. It had adopted a statement by the President on the human rights implications of COVID-19 (A/HRC/PRST/43/1), and addressed systemic racism, recognizing in its first resolution

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<sup>1</sup> For further details on the Social Forum, see [www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/SForum/Pages/SForumIndex.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/SForum/Pages/SForumIndex.aspx).

(resolution 43/1) that inequalities based on racism affected all human rights. Poverty was mentioned in several recent resolutions. The President recalled the duty of all to build back better and to do all possible to eliminate poverty and inequalities.

7. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, noted that rampant poverty, pervasive inequalities and structural discrimination were human rights violations and among the greatest global challenges. Addressing them effectively would require measures grounded in human rights principles, and the cooperation and participation of all, especially those most affected. The decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals was coinciding, owing to COVID-19, with the first rise in global poverty since 1998, pushing more than 100 million people into extreme poverty. People in vulnerable situations and without social protection were the worst affected, including people living in poverty, women and girls, children and youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, people of African descent, racial, ethnic and religious minorities, indigenous peoples, migrants and refugees. Poorer nations faced challenges to their ability to deliver on economic and social rights, including foreign debt, collapsing trade, falling remittances, capital flight, currency depreciation and limited international development assistance. Building back better would require a reversal of long-standing cycles of poverty and inequalities and a strengthening of commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals and human rights. The High Commissioner called for a new global deal towards more inclusive global governance, better regulations on finance, trade and investment, debt relief, progressive tax systems, the promotion of productive capacities in vulnerable countries to overcome poverty and climate change-related challenges, development cooperation and access to a vaccine against COVID-19 as a global public good, with universal social protection ensured, people's right to development protected and the pivotal role of civil society upheld.

### **III. Summary of proceedings**

#### **A. Keynote panel**

8. The Vice-Minister of the State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development of China, Chen Zhigang, stated that the reduction and elimination of poverty were integral parts of human rights protection. The Communist Party of China and the Chinese Government treated people's right to subsistence and development as the top priority and were dedicated to promoting human rights through poverty reduction. In 2012, the Communist Party set the goal of lifting the poor rural population and all poor counties out of poverty and eliminating absolute poverty based on the current standard by 2020. By following the principles of "poverty identification before poverty relief", "specific people responsible for specific programmes" and "finding the right prescription to deal with the symptoms" and with a view to targeted poverty reduction, China had delivered the best score in its poverty reduction history. With data collection on poverty, training of professional skills, support for specialized industries, the dispatch of 2.9 million officials to conduct poverty relief work, connection to e-commerce platforms and the perfection of the social security network, the number of poor people had decreased from 98.99 million in 2012 to 5.51 million in 2019. Further results had been in the improvement of infrastructure and public services, and the perfection of the poverty reduction system. Regarding the impact of COVID-19 on global poverty reduction, the Vice-Minister recommended that attention be paid to women, children, older persons and persons with disabilities, that policy dialogues be reinforced and intellectual product development and information exchange promoted, that the role of new technologies and new media be acknowledged and that the role of the Human Rights Council in poverty reduction be strengthened.

9. The Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, Winnie Byanyima, shared three lessons learned from the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which should guide the fight against COVID-19. First, health care should be regarded as a human right. To that end, health systems should be based on public provision, so that everyone had equal and affordable access. Global corporate tax reforms, notably to curb illicit financial flows, were critical to collect the revenue necessary. Health technology distribution systems should be reformed to end inappropriate intellectual property protection

for vaccines. Drawing on experience with HIV, India had advanced the production of generic antiretroviral drugs at lower prices for poorer countries. The ongoing initiative by India and South Africa to seek a waiver of intellectual property protection should be supported to make COVID-19 treatments affordable. Second, the issue of health care should be addressed through a human rights-based approach and grounded in human rights principles. With HIV/AIDS, it was when the marginalized and stigmatized rose to advocate for their rights and for an end to stigmatization, discrimination and criminalization – including women, migrants, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, persons who used drugs and sex workers – that the tide turned. The rights of those groups must be upheld to end the COVID-19 pandemic, including by removing structural discrimination, such as discriminatory criminal laws. It was only through a human rights-based approach that public health outcomes could be achieved for all. Third, global solidarity must prevail over “vaccine nationalism”, to end systems that put profits before people. Global solutions were imperative to fight pandemics. Vaccines must be distributed to health workers first, vulnerable people next, and then to all others, in accordance with the recommendations of the World Health Organization.

10. The Co-Director of the World Inequality Lab and World Inequality Database at the Paris School of Economics and Lecturer at Sciences Po, Lucas Chancel, highlighted that the world’s top billionaires had increased their wealth by 25 per cent since the COVID-19 outbreak, amassing two thousand billion dollars. The pandemic’s external shock had exacerbated economic, gender and racial inequalities. Even before the pandemic, societies had little resilience, as 40 years of neoliberalism had favoured less tax and more privatization and fostered inequalities, benefiting wealthy people and companies. The increase in inequalities had been better mitigated in some countries, illustrating that public policies could offer solutions. In developing good policies, transparency in financial information was critical, and Governments must carry out better mapping and disclose and monitor inequalities. Investment in public services and redistribution policies were essential to ensure access to basic goods and services for poorer families. Taxation and redistribution were key to financing such investment, and inheritance tax and global corporate tax reforms were warranted to that end. Social systems and the social fabric must be redesigned for more resilience. The economic system must be re-embedded with broader objectives to deliver justice and benefits to future generations worldwide.

11. The High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu, emphasized that climate change, poverty and inequality should be addressed as a whole, keeping in mind symbiosis, togetherness, dignity and respect, to redress the impact of COVID-19. The pandemic had showed how climate change was a critical multiplier, accelerating poverty and inequalities in the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States. An already unsustainable debt situation had further deteriorated as revenue-earning activities had come to a standstill and major job losses had occurred, reducing government revenues. Formal safety nets rarely existed in those countries and foreign remittances were declining. Lockdown measures and climate change had caused social disruption, undermining food security, access to education and basic connectivity, especially in vulnerable countries such as small island developing States. Given the increased poverty and inequalities within and among countries as a result of COVID-19, the High Representative presented four recommendations. First, the pandemic should not be used as an excuse to divert efforts to address climate change and honour the Paris Agreement. Second, long-term, sustainable solutions to the escalating debt crisis were needed. Third, the international community should increase support to financial stimulus packages for vulnerable countries. Fourth, truly meaningful, effective and inclusive participation of people was essential.

12. Dalit social activist and laureate of the 2006 Right Livelihood Award, Ruth Manorama, spoke about the injustices of the caste system and systemic gender-based violence against Dalit women, who are at the bottom of the caste hierarchy. She described cases concerning caste-based sexual assaults, denial of access to education for Dalit girls, and the practice of manual scavenging of toilets. Through Dalit activism, several practices had been curtailed. Living conditions of Dalits were harsher than those of others, and 30 per cent of Dalits lived below the poverty line, compared to 12 per cent of others. The life

expectancy of Dalits was four years less than that of others. States should increase the income of the poor, ensure access to public services including water and sanitation, education and health care, and promote tax and fiscal justice for that purpose. Gender equality should be promoted through action plans. Full employment, the minimum wage and the issue of precarious work, especially with respect to Dalit women, should be priorities. Governments must act to reduce inequalities and, to that end, listen to and empower Dalit women to identify new pedagogies and strategies.

13. Following the keynote speakers, the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Olivier De Schutter, presented a matrix demonstrating multiple causes of poverty at different levels and their interactions.<sup>2</sup> Several factors prevented public policies from effectively reducing poverty, such as insufficient investment in early childhood leading to intergenerational transmission of poverty, discrimination against people living in poverty and illicit financial flows. The Chair of the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development, Bonny Ibhawoh, informed the Forum that the mechanism would address racism, poverty and inequalities in the context of the right to development. The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on racial and ethnic minorities worldwide underscored the fact that racism and racial discrimination posed fundamental obstacles to realizing the right to development.

14. Representatives of the European Union, Azerbaijan (on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries), Burkina Faso (on behalf of the Group of African States), Algeria, Bangladesh, Cuba, Egypt, Greece, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Malaysia, Pakistan, Tunisia and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) made statements. Representatives of the United Nations Development Programme Office in Geneva, the Asociación Internacional de Derechos Humanos y Desarrollo Social, the Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, Grameen Foundation India, the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman), Maloca Internationale and the Western Sahara Campaign UK also spoke.

15. Participants emphasized that COVID-19 had affected mostly those who were already vulnerable, exacerbating existing poverty and inequalities. They highlighted the importance of international solidarity and cooperation, including South-South and triangular cooperation, and a holistic approach to human rights. There was a risk of failure to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and it was time to reinforce international cooperation, remove unilateral coercive measures, share health technologies, adopt debt relief, ensure development assistance, increase investment and counter climate change. Social protection through socioeconomic impact assessments was key in order to save people needing assistance, and minimum basic income should be financed through reduced military spending. Access to health must not be a privilege for the rich, but a public good for all. Access to housing, food, education and other public services was key in order to break cycles of poverty and avoid pushing more people into poverty. States should collaborate for appropriate taxation at the national and international levels, to close gaps that enabled tax avoidance by transnational corporations. Discrimination against marginalized groups had been aggravated by the pandemic. Ethnic minorities, people of African descent, Roma people, rural communities, people living under occupation, migrant workers and other stigmatized or excluded groups must be empowered and represented in public spaces. States must act to reduce unemployment and precarious work, which posed major obstacles to eradicating poverty.

## **B. Community level: factors perpetuating inequality and intergenerational transmission of poverty, and how to overcome them**

16. The Executive Director of the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona, said that COVID-19 had widened gender inequalities, increasing poverty among women and girls. She presented factors that explained its disproportionate effects on women. First, most front-line health-care workers were women, and women were overrepresented at the lowest levels of the health-care response. Second, confinement measures had threatened the security of women, with an increase in gender-based domestic violence. Third, gains in labour market inclusion of women could be

<sup>2</sup> See [www.ohchr.org/SiteCollectionImages/Issues/SForum/2020-social-forum.png](http://www.ohchr.org/SiteCollectionImages/Issues/SForum/2020-social-forum.png).

reversed in sectors such as retail and tourism. Fourth, quarantines and public health measures adversely affected informal work and small businesses, wherein women were overrepresented. Fifth, the working conditions of domestic workers had become even more precarious. Lastly, the pandemic had exposed the unjust social organization of care and exacerbated the disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work on women and girls. However, it had also opened up opportunities for progressive reforms: first, expanding social protection coverage, including through gender-effective social protection measures; second, advancing gender equality in taxation measures by eliminating the gender biases therein and combating tax evasion; and, third, increasing investment in public services, notably the care sector.

17. The Research Director at the Joseph Wresinski Archives and Research Centre, of the International Movement ATD Fourth World, Xavier Godinot, shared the results of research conducted jointly by his organization and the University of Oxford on institutional and social maltreatment with the direct participation of persons living in poverty in all its phases, with insights into their lived experience. Drawing on testimonies from Bolivian mothers living in poverty, he explained that the core experience of poverty was characterized by three dimensions: disempowerment, suffering in body, mind and heart, and fight and resistance for survival. Disempowerment resulted from the lack of decent work, insufficient and insecure income, material and social deprivations, unrecognized contributions and social and institutional maltreatment. Social maltreatment constituted negative treatment and stigma imposed on people in poverty by their surroundings, denying them dignity and identity. Institutional maltreatment was the inability of national or international institutions, through their action or inaction, to respond appropriately to the needs of the people concerned. People living in poverty were often blamed for their own situation, and their talents and knowledge were ignored. He recommended combining social and environmental justice in action plans, since people in poverty contributed the least to pollution, climate change and loss of biodiversity, but were the most affected by them. He also proposed improving civil registration, as poor people were often not registered and were unable to benefit from social protection.

18. The representative of FIAN International responsible for accountability and monitoring, Ana María Suárez Franco, discussed food systems and the right to food of people living in poverty. She noted that 690 million people were suffering from hunger and 132 million more were estimated to be suffering from food insecurity owing to COVID-19. Food insecurity caused other human rights violations, and undermined peace and security and gender equality. Land concentration in the hands of agribusinesses and facilitated by financial institutions affected poor people's access to food and resources, including through the privatization of water. Along with the relocation of indigenous peoples, large agribusinesses were also responsible for 11 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions, contributing to climate change, pollution, environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity. Poor people often ended up eating highly processed food, as it was cheaper than healthy food, and suffered from obesity and other health problems, perpetuating cycles of poverty. The movement defending the right to food recommended that the transformation of food systems should include the protection of peasant and indigenous food systems, allow the participation of small food producers in the formulation of policies, promote agroecology, hold accountable enterprises that undermined the right to food, redistribute health and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas. She warned against false top-down solutions and defended structural changes in food systems that were inclusive and took into account the realities of local communities.

19. A Young Adviser at the Office of the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland, Hope Laing, shared young people's experiences of poverty. In Scotland, poverty affected almost one in four children, with COVID-19 exacerbating the situation. She discussed food poverty, period poverty and poor access to digital technology. Regarding food poverty, she highlighted the health, academic, social and behavioural impacts on children's development. With school closures during the pandemic, the Government had provided alternative support to families relying on free school meals, which had not always reached all families in need or addressed their nutritional requirements. Regarding period poverty, one in four girls had an experience of missing school because of lack of sufficient menstruation products. While 4 million pounds had been provided to local authorities to make

such products available free of charge, the closure of public buildings owing to COVID-19 had made access difficult. Regarding poor access to digital technology, many students lacked technological equipment and a reliable connection, with families often sharing one device, especially in remote regions. The shift to online education had posed serious challenges. She emphasized the need to improve access to food, technology and period products for young people. Human rights-based approaches, including a voice for youth, were key to finding solutions.

20. During the interactive dialogue, representatives of Cuba and of the Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, the International Movement ATD Fourth World Senegal, the Instituto de Estudos Previdenciários, the Asociación Internacional de Derechos Humanos y Desarrollo Social and Patriotic Vision took the floor. Participants stressed the importance of community engagement of people in poverty in decision-making processes, which constituted due process and enabled effective measures. Poverty should be addressed from a human rights perspective, and the international community must provide support through solidarity and respond to development and humanitarian needs over political interests. International cooperation in taxation and development assistance were vital. COVID-19 had exacerbated gender-based violence and other forms of discrimination. Women must enjoy social protection. Children and adolescents were among the poorest and most vulnerable, and their voices must count.

21. In response, Ms. Suárez Franco underlined that root causes of poverty were interrelated, and therefore must be approached holistically. To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, States should fulfil their human rights obligations with a strong political will. Ms. Sepúlveda Carmona stressed the importance of participation in decision-making processes, called for a bold redistribution policy and emphasized that economic, social and cultural rights must be ensured through public services. Ms. Laing echoed the need to integrate local communities and youth in decision-making.

### **C. Global-local interlinkages: obstacles to realizing the right to development and to addressing poverty and inequality**

22. The Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights, Alena Douhan, discussed the expansion of unilateral sanctions, which posed an obstacle to enjoyment of many human rights, including the right to development. Unilateral coercive measures had no basis in the Charter of the United Nations or in customary international law, and in several resolutions they had been denounced as illegal and negatively affecting human rights. The recent practice of “sectoral” sanctions entailed imposing sanctions on the whole population that was engaging with a particular sphere of the economy, without identifiable reasons for doing so. Targeted individuals sometimes had no redress mechanisms to protect their rights. She emphasized that the pandemic had made more relevant than ever the negative impact of unilateral sanctions and secondary sanctions, with the consequent disruption of international supply chains and impediments to multilateral cooperation. Polymerase chain reaction test kits, hygienic products and other medical equipment were running out in sanctioned countries, most of which were deprived of access to online meeting platforms, adversely affecting business and education. Unilateral sanctions led to violations of labour and other rights, including health, food, education and information, and even the right to life. The international community could not protect human rights or recover from the COVID-19 crisis without solidarity and cooperation, implementation of the right to development and withdrawal of unilateral coercive measures.

23. The Africa Policy Manager and Global Internet Shutdowns Lead at Access Now, Berhan Taye, discussed digital divides as an obstacle to addressing inequality. The digital divide reflected offline inequalities, excluding 3.6 billion people worldwide, especially women, rural inhabitants, minority groups and those with less formal education. Digital inequalities had a negative impact on economic conditions and human rights, further exacerbated by COVID-19. People without a computer and reliable Internet access had been unable to work or learn during the confinement. Regions with inadequate health-care services and water sanitation infrastructure and fewer tarmac roads coincided with those with less

Internet access. Unlike other offline infrastructure and services, telecommunications were provided mostly by private companies, which invested only in profitable areas. A lack of smart regulations aggravated the digital divide. Internet shutdowns also exacerbated digital inequality, with massive socioeconomic impacts and large-scale disruption of education and economic activity. Restrictive policy regulations, such as social media taxation and blogger registration, forced the poor to pay more to connect to the Internet.

24. The Executive Director of the South Centre, Carlos María Correa, focused on the importance of technology transfer to overcome barriers to development. Technology was key to realizing the right to development and achieving development, including in agriculture, industry and services and for job creation. Because of asymmetries among countries, technology transfer was an important means of obtaining technology for developing countries. Since 1990, developing countries had advanced from 6 per cent to 38 per cent of the world's investment in research and development, an increase mostly attributable to China. He listed obstacles to technology development in developing countries: the expansion of intellectual property rights, which were concentrated in member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); the accelerating pace of technological change; the reluctance of companies in developed countries to share technologies with potential competitors; and an increase in techno-nationalism and affirmation of technological sovereignty in developed countries. He recalled normative and policy frameworks promoting technology transfer, which had not yet achieved their goals or were too early to assess, such as the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries. Revitalizing the international technology transfer agenda was crucial to help developing countries realize the right to development.

25. Legal Advisor and Senior Researcher at the Third World Network, Sanya Reid Smith, presented on intellectual property rights and access to medicines. She warned that distributing a COVID-19 vaccine first to the whole population of developed countries, instead of prioritizing health-care workers and vulnerable populations worldwide, would imply a doubling of the number of deaths globally. Patents and trade secrets on medicines, vaccines, ventilators, copyrights and masks impeded access to measures to contain the pandemic. There were exceptions in the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, but these were insufficient and difficult to use to address the massive challenges posed by the pandemic. India and South Africa had proposed a waiver of intellectual property rights in the context of COVID-19. However, developed countries continued to negotiate bilateral free trade agreements containing intellectual property protection clauses, and law firms were preparing to provide advice to medical companies to sue Governments that breached patents of technologies related to COVID-19. She supported calls to stop new trade negotiations and remove intellectual property barriers in the context of the pandemic.

26. Following the presentations, a member of the Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, Rodrigo Uprimny, explained that justiciability for economic and social rights was a normative obligation of States, reinforced a culture of rights, guaranteed that public services were granted without discrimination, contributed to prioritizing those rights in public policy, and was important in fighting poverty and inequality. During the interactive dialogue, representatives of Bangladesh, Cuba, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Malaysia and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) made statements. Representatives of Action on Smoking and Health, the Asociación Internacional de Derechos Humanos y Desarrollo Social, the Association of World Citizens, the Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, the Corporación Centro de Estudios de Derecho, Justicia y Sociedad and Geneva International Model United Nations took the floor. Speakers supported the negotiation of a legally binding instrument on the right to development and other measures to realize that right, including reducing spending on military and industries such as tobacco and redirecting resources to promote sustainable development and relieve the debt of developing countries. Participants condemned unilateral coercive measures as undermining the rights to development and self-determination of the affected populations and increasing poverty and inequalities. They advocated a people-centred regime of intellectual property based on solidarity, and universal distribution of vaccines and other treatments for COVID-19, considering the circumstances of the least developed countries.

27. In response, Ms. Douhan called for assessments of each step of the implementation of unilateral coercive measures and broader involvement of United Nations agencies to end those measures. Ms. Reid Smith detailed the practice in the World Trade Organization of requiring higher protection of intellectual property in acceding developing countries than in other member States. Mr. Correa expressed support for the drafting of a legally binding instrument on the right to development. He defended restrictions, waivers and exceptions to intellectual property rights for medical treatments for COVID-19 and suggested that countries affected by unilateral coercive measures should rely more on South-South cooperation. Ms. Taye stressed that unilateral coercive measures and overcompliance limited access to the Internet and applications, negatively affecting the human rights of the affected populations. She also highlighted the importance of grass-roots organizations in promoting the right to development.

#### **D. Global-local interlinkages: productive capacity, public budgeting, tax justice and participation**

28. The Head of the Trade and Poverty Branch of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Patrick Osakwe, discussed productive capacities for sustainable development in Africa. African countries would be disproportionately affected by the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19. A total of 50 per cent of the resulting rise in global poverty was expected to be in Africa, which accounted for only 14 per cent of the global population. Development policies should address economic, social and political factors that exposed disadvantaged communities to poverty, denying them decent jobs and participation in sustainable development. Developing productive capacity was key to eradicating poverty in Africa, and would entail boosting capital accumulation for investment, diversifying production and export structures, adopting national industrial policies that prioritized high productivity, and strengthening and making better use of existing industries and capacities. UNCTAD had established the productive capacities index to enable countries to monitor and benchmark productive capacities in their economies as a guide to policy formulation. It had also published a report on how to adopt a holistic approach to building and utilizing productive capacities.

29. Economist and Researcher at the Institute for Economic Justice in South Africa, Busi Sibeko, stressed the need to break with orthodox economic policy thinking and policymaking when discussing fiscal and budget justice. Economic policies had been focused on limited fiscal deficits and minimal State intervention, which had negative ramifications for the realization of human rights, as responsibilities were transferred to the private sector. Assumptions of economic policies and budgeting decisions, such as those involving *Homo economicus*, did not include the redistributive impacts on various groups; for example, the distribution of care work and environmental impacts. That orthodoxy in economics was thus unsuitable for promoting fiscal and budget justice. Globally, austerity measures had increased poverty, inequalities, debt and unemployment, and disproportionately affected women and marginalized groups. Developing countries should adopt expansionary fiscal policies towards a just recovery that would build productive capacities and lead to structural transformation. She proposed that Governments: (a) target spending where there would be high impact, such as with respect to children; (b) invest in sectors of high growth and employment multipliers; (c) boost demand through cash transfers to households; (d) improve livelihoods for the most vulnerable; (e) raise supply (by investing in productive capacity) and advance structural transformation; (f) undo harm caused by austerity measures; (g) reduce inequality; (h) support environmentally progressive stimulus; (i) develop new social compacts that protected jobs; and (j) promote long-term economic sustainability in terms of debt and fiscal space.

30. Senior Advisor on Corporate Advocacy at Oxfam America, Nicholas Lusiani, underscored the importance of fiscal space, taxation and avoidance of illicit financial flows for the eradication of poverty and inequalities. COVID-19 had exacerbated inequalities among men and women, rich and poor, privileged and forgotten, workers and large corporations. Governmental action to provide economic lifelines to people during the pandemic had resulted in record levels of debt worldwide. That situation could create a

pretext for adopting austerity measures with long-lasting effects. In the past decade, austerity measures had been a fundamental driver of the erosion of human rights through budget cuts for essential public services, regressive tax reforms, labour market reforms and pension reforms. He called for a reimagining of the future with an alternative to austerity through taxation to promote human rights and equality, which would imply strongly progressive personal and corporate income tax realized by international cooperation, temporary COVID-19 profit taxes to recover the damage to the most affected, and a more effective wealth tax. Human rights norms and principles must guide tax norms and mechanisms equipped with tools to monitor them. Existing tools included the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the guiding principles on human rights impact assessments of economic reforms.

31. Commentator for GloboNews, columnist for *O Globo* newspaper and presenter of the Rádio CBN podcast *Angu de Grilo* in Brazil, Flávia Oliveira, discussed discrimination, racism and participation in budgeting in the context of Brazil. The devastating health and socioeconomic crises resulting from the pandemic had worsened extreme inequalities in Brazil. Those inequalities had prevailed since colonial times, with the enslavement of black people and with the patriarchy that persisted despite over a century of legal developments. Socially excluded persons had precarious access to water, sanitation, housing and facilities for social distancing. The killing of George Floyd had had major impacts worldwide, reinvigorating the fight against police violence directed at young black people. It had also empowered claims for better opportunities for education, health care and employment. Social movements advocated fairer distribution of access to decision-making on budget and fiscal matters. In order to build a more equal society, a system dominated by middle-aged white men would need to be confronted. She argued that full democracy and equality was possible only if diversity of societies was reflected in positions of political and economic power, including women, youth, people of African descent and indigenous peoples.

32. In the interactive dialogue, speakers from UNCTAD, Articulação Negra de Pernambuco, the Asabe Shehu Yar'Adua Foundation, the Asociación Internacional de Derechos Humanos y Desarrollo Social, the International Movement ATD Fourth World, BRAC, the International Human Rights Commission, Maloca Internationale and the Swiss Indigenous Network took the floor. Participants underlined the importance of inclusiveness for the poor and the vulnerable to genuinely participate in public policies. Transparency and accountability were called for, and corruption was criticized as an enabler of poverty. While equal opportunities and social protection were essential, COVID-19 had aggravated inequalities, especially for women, including domestic workers. South-South cooperation could be a tool to fight poverty and inequalities and achieve development. Good practices shared included the “graduation approach” to empower women in Bangladesh, indigenous practices in Colombia and inclusive development plans in China.

33. In closing, Mr. Osakwe underscored the importance of cooperation among developing countries to increase productive capacity and mutual learning. The least developed countries could learn from the industrial policies of China and the agricultural policies of Brazil. Further, redistribution policies, the participation of groups suffering discrimination and progressive taxation, including wealth, environmental and capital gains taxes, could combat poverty and inequalities and advance inclusive development. Ms. Sibeko shared good practices from South Africa on participatory mechanisms at the municipal, provincial and national levels, including progressive taxation. Working with grass-roots organizations could give a voice to the people and empower them with economic analysis. Mr. Lusiani noted that States were making progress in addressing illicit financial flows. However, international rules undermine governmental capacity to tax multinational corporations. OECD had undertaken initiatives on profit shifting and taxation, but for change to be achieved, the debate would need to take place within the United Nations, a more democratic forum. Ms. Oliveira presented the activities undertaken by grass-roots and national associations in favelas to support the most vulnerable people.

## **E. Role of the State and public policies in addressing poverty and inequalities**

34. The National Director of Science and Technological Research at the Ministry of Public Health of Cuba, Ileana Morales Suárez, highlighted the need for equity in social policies. Cuba ensured free and universal social services as human rights for all, with universal access to vaccines and medicines, mostly produced locally. It prioritized human rights and dedicated most of its budget to health care, notably preventive and primary health services, social assistance and education. The COVID-19 pandemic had resulted from long-standing global issues such as natural environment degradation, demographic expansion in the southern hemisphere, increased inequalities and unsustainable consumer practices. The pandemic demonstrated the insufficiency of the neoliberal model of privatizing basic health services and reinforced the need for public and universal health systems. Cuba had created a national plan to fight the pandemic, which had been successful owing, inter alia, to strong political will, interministerial coordination, solid organization of the health system, social participation, preventive care for vulnerable groups and total isolation of suspected cases. Despite the adverse effects of the illegal blockade against Cuba, high levels of health indicators had been maintained. She called for international solidarity, exemplified in the efforts of Cuba, whereby over 3,500 medical doctors had been sent to affected countries, among other measures.

35. The Director of the Social Protection Department of the International Labour Organization (ILO), Shahra Razavi, emphasized that social protection systems combated poverty and inequalities and were effective against systemic shocks, and she cited good practices from middle- and high-income countries. Social protection systems were highly uneven among countries and faced numerous challenges. Self-employed, informal and migrant workers, among others, often lacked access to social protection. Many social protection measures adopted by developing countries, such as cash transfers, were temporary, not recognized in law, and grossly insufficient. Lack of paid sick leave and unemployment benefits were common gaps in social protection. Building universal and comprehensive systems that delivered social security as a human right without discrimination required fiscal capacity, sustained investments in social protection systems and the mobilization of resources from diverse sources. Domestic resource mobilization must be just and based on progressive taxes such as wealth tax. International support and solidarity were critical to mobilizing resources in low-income countries. It was imperative to streamline the policy frameworks of all relevant actors, especially international financial institutions, based on human rights rather than austerity.

36. The Children's Commissioner of New Zealand, Andrew Becroft, stated that child poverty persisted even in New Zealand, despite its strong economy. The country had experienced a dramatic increase in child poverty in 1991 and 1992, in contrast to the situation of persons over the age of 65 years, who had been comprehensively covered by a universal benefit linked to wage growth. A total of 10 to 12 per cent of children had still been in situations of significant, demonstrable material disadvantage since 1991. He shared three examples of good practice in New Zealand: the adoption of the Child Poverty Reduction Act, obliging the Government to achieve targets and indicators in reducing child poverty; the linkage of benefits to wage growth, so that children benefited proportionately from economic growth; and the implementation of a child and youth well-being strategy. States should improve public services to children, especially by providing affordable and accessible adequate housing and in-kind benefits such as free school meals and free access to dental and health care up to the age of 18 years. They must reinforce support in the first thousand days of life, giving a good start to households. Nation-building required countries to spend money with good strategies to prioritize addressing child poverty.

37. The General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation, Sharan Burrow, recalled that even before COVID-19, the labour market was facing historically high levels of racial, income and gender inequalities, within and between countries, aggravated by the climate emergency, unfair trade rules, precarious labour rights and lack of social protection. The pandemic had resulted in the loss of 500 million jobs and the prospect of destitution for 1.6 billion informal workers, while the world's richest had greatly increased

their wealth. The elements of recovery and resilience were already embedded in the 2019 ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, involving a new social contract based on labour protection floors, fundamental labour rights and standards, including minimum and living wages, maximum hours of work, a transformative agenda for women workers, and just climate- and technology-related transition. Building resilience required social protection across the board, including income support for self-employed and informal workers. To create jobs, States should invest in sustainable infrastructure, care work and just transition. She advocated a universal protection fund to support the poorest countries comprising direct donations from the wealthiest countries, special drawing rights, debt relief decoupled from austerity, and an income tax floor for corporations.

38. The Chair of the Mongolian Women's Employment Supporting Federation, Ariunaa Shagdarsuren, and the Chair of the Alliance for Development in Mongolia, Dolgor Ayush, shared their experiences under the "Chance to Change" project, aimed at improving the income of women living and working in unacceptable conditions in landfills and the education of their children. The female garbage collectors had first been provided with information and training. After building trust, the organizations had supported them to raise their voices and claim their rights before governmental authorities, resulting in the opening of several governmental services for the community. Help had been provided to improve working conditions and to find other work opportunities, and a centre had been opened to provide education, childcare, psychological counselling and social services for the children. Drawing on that experience, the Chairs made recommendations to address the poverty of garbage collectors, by providing them with the following: migration registration, so that they could enjoy public services; land on which to build their own houses; equality in public services, especially regarding social welfare; and childcare centres. Governments, non-governmental organizations and the private sector should work together to reduce inequality and ensure development for everyone, everywhere.

39. The Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context, Balakrishnan Rajagopal, discussed the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on people who were homeless, or living in informal settlements and grossly inadequate housing. Even before the pandemic, there had been a lack of public housing, large-scale eviction and rent increase, homelessness, discrimination in access to housing, and a global crisis in the lack of affordable housing, and the most marginalized communities had suffered the most. The pandemic had exposed the problems generated by neoliberal approaches to urbanization, which had resulted in rising informality and inadequate or overcrowded housing. He expressed concern over an increase in forced eviction during the pandemic, which often led to homelessness, and reiterated the call for a moratorium on eviction. Good practices by Governments during the pandemic had included mortgage postponements, increased social security payments and temporary bans on eviction. He urged States to consider more permanent solutions to the multiple dimensions of the housing crisis and to make the pandemic an opportunity for change.

40. During the interactive dialogue, representatives of Bahrain, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Georgia, India, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Ukraine and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) made statements. Representatives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights of Hungary, Africa Culture Internationale Human Rights, the Asociación Internacional de Derechos Humanos y Desarrollo Social, the Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, the International Movement ATD Fourth World, the Fundació Josep Irla, the International Organization for the Right to Education and Freedom of Education and the Organisation mondiale des associations pour l'éducation prénatale took the floor. Participants stressed that States, and not the private sector, were primarily responsible for reducing poverty and inequalities, and should cooperate to do so. They should lead the fight against poverty, climate change and natural disasters, involving other actors. Education for the full development of human personality was key to breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty and social exclusion of minority groups. Refugees and internally displaced persons needed legal and social protection, jobs, training and opportunities to enable them to contribute to their host communities. COVID-19 success stories included *in loco* monitoring of living conditions of the poor, funds for cash, health care, housing, food, water and sanitation for the most

vulnerable, measures supporting small enterprises and national plans for sustainable development. Recommendations covered matters including the collection of disaggregated data, universal health coverage, racial and gender equality, parental leave equality, universal basic income, cash transfers, online information, communications technologies and efforts to fight corruption.

41. In concluding, Ms. Razavi shared good practices regarding the inclusion of domestic and other informal workers in social security systems. She referred to the challenges and good practices in offering social protection to self-employed workers, contributing family workers and others with no recognizable employers, such as through a simplified “mono-tax” regime. The extension of protection to informal workers required mandatory registration and insurance to enable cross-subsidies, and should transparently provide benefits. Mr. Becroft highlighted that States should play an active role in reducing child poverty through plans with public measurable targets. He called for collective action to reduce poverty worldwide, especially child poverty, in line with the 2030 Agenda.

## **F. International level: the global economy, financing for sustainable development and the right to development<sup>3</sup>**

42. The Director of the Globalization and Development Strategies Division at UNCTAD, Richard Kozul-Wright, stated that COVID-19 had exposed the weaknesses of the multilateral system in supporting achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, which were essentially a set of interconnected public goods aimed at inclusive and sustainable interaction. Achievement of the Goals required massive investment supported by targeted public policies and a strong multilateral system. According to the UNCTAD Trade and Development Report 2020, the hyperglobalized world economy, driven by private finance, centred around large corporations and motivated by neoliberalism, was biased against the realization of the Goals. It exacerbated inequalities, indebtedness and labour insecurity and generated insufficient investments. The multilateral system had been designed in 1945 to support a strong public sector and policy space to address social and political challenges and prevent austerity policies. However, it was doing the opposite: limiting the public sector and policy space and promoting austerity. Deep systemic reform of the multilateral system should include special drawing rights to provide liquidity, a greater amount of unconditional concessional finance by international institutions, a strengthening of international tax systems, the creation of a new international debt cancellation authority and public credit rating agencies, and an equivalent of the Marshall Plan to address the socioeconomic challenges arising from the pandemic. Bold policies would be required to collectively chart a new path leading from pandemic recovery to a more resilient, equal and sustainable world, aligned with the ambition of the 2030 Agenda.

43. The Managing Director of the Society for International Development, Stefano Prato, discussed the role of financing for development in realizing the right to development. He highlighted the potential of vibrant local economies in unfolding the process of social and economic transformation. Global value chains had been more concerned with grabbing values than adding values. They had contributed to the commodity dependence of developing countries and to rupture in the relationship between the primary, industrial and services sectors. Extreme delocalization had disintegrated the local social contract between production, population and ecology. Reducing the global economy’s weight on national economies was critical. Local food systems could base a new economic agenda centred on a reduction of inequalities. Macro monetary, trade and investment frameworks pushed for countries to build more global aspects in local economies. That process could be reversed with more democratization of global governance and systemic transformation. The United Nations process of financing for development enabled that systemic reform to be discussed in a forum in which developing countries had full participation, with a window of opportunity to push for reform of tax regimes, debt architecture and the dynamics of financialization. Multilateral reforms required stronger participation and closer cooperation between capitals and permanent representatives to the United Nations.

<sup>3</sup> Panel organized in collaboration with UNCTAD.

44. Consultant on global economic governance, finance and development, Bhumika Muchhala, warned that developing countries were expected to adopt austerity measures after the pandemic, undermining their ability to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the targets of the Paris Agreement. The burdens of debt and economic crises would be shifted to the most vulnerable, exacerbating inequalities, exclusion, discrimination and human rights violations, especially for women and poor people. Over 500 organizations had called upon the International Monetary Fund to reverse austerity recommendations. Empirical impact analysis had demonstrated that austerity deepened poverty, through reductions in health and education investments, losses of pensions and social protection, public wage freezes and layoffs affecting public sector employees, increased unpaid care work and greater regressive consumption taxes, violating core minimum standards, the principle of non-retrogression and the progressive realization of economic, social and cultural rights. States should abandon the belief in austerity and instead promote implementation of the Declaration on the Right to Development. She advocated expansionary, countercyclical fiscal policies as a means of achieving recovery, employment and stronger public systems and services. Such measures included progressive taxation and social protection systems such as social security for informal workers. Other measures toward fiscal and redistributive justice included special drawing rights, a United Nations sovereign debt workout mechanism, a United Nations tax body, and reconfiguration of debt sustainability assessments to cover human rights, the Sustainable Development Goals and climate financing.

45. The Independent Expert on the effects of foreign debt and other related international financial obligations of States on the full enjoyment of all human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights, Li Yuefen, emphasized that COVID-19 and the ensuing economic recession had reversed years of progress towards achieving sustainable development, especially in terms of poverty alleviation and the reduction of inequalities related to income and gender. Debt undermined the capacity of stimulus packages to meet economic, social and cultural rights. The pandemic had decreased the revenues available to Governments for realizing rights, while their expenditure had been largely compromised with debt servicing. In 2019, 64 low-income countries had spent more on external debt payments than on health care. The capacity of developing countries to allocate resources to responding to the crisis was much lower than that of developed countries. Debt payments should not take precedence over the realization of rights, especially at times of such external shocks. The international community had adopted provisions to allow breathing space, debt standstills, and debt restructuring or cancellation. In May 2020, the Independent Expert had made recommendations relating to debt suspension and liquidity expansion through special drawing rights, many of which were being implemented. Reforms of the debt architecture based on global cooperation, including a debt restructuring mechanism, could enable timely and fair debt resolution.

46. Following the presentations, the Special Rapporteur on the right to development, Saad Alfarargi, recalled the political, economic and demographic challenges of realizing the right to development. Given widening disparities, there was a need for measures to support the bottom percentile of income earners, disaggregated data and the placement of rights holders at the centre of development policy processes. Representatives of Bangladesh and India made statements. Representatives of Africa Culture Internationale Human Rights, the Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, the Fundación Abba Colombia, Maloca Internationale and the Organisation pour la communication en Afrique et de promotion de la coopération économique internationale took the floor. Participants asserted that the right to development was key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. States must identify those most in need, support universal basic income and ensure that stimulus packages reached the needy and not banks or arms trade. The challenges facing African countries, people of African descent and youth worldwide must be addressed. Accumulated external debt undermined social welfare schemes. Participants recommended systemic reforms in the global financial architecture to increase democratization and solidarity, including through technology transfer, official development assistance, closure of the digital divide and support for the least developed countries in market access and graduation processes.

47. In response, Mr. Prato reiterated that systemic reforms towards more inclusive global economic governance and the transformation of local economies to empower States were essential to realize rights and sustainable development. Mr. Kozul-Wright explained that

lessons learned from the post-2008 crisis had suggested that austerity, labour market flexibility and wage repression should be avoided. Better outcomes needed pro-employment, pro-wage growth, pro-industrial diversification dynamics and international support for developing countries. Ms. Li expressed support for systemic reform of debt governance. Developing countries feared that resorting to debt relief would lead to access to future credit being blocked. Private creditors were reluctant to engage in relief measures. The International Monetary Fund should pursue quota reform to better reflect developing countries' voices. Ms. Muchhala highlighted that the right to development meant that development was a right rather than charity, and was linked to the international economic order. The International Monetary Fund had a key role in signalling the stability of developing countries and allowing them fiscal space to revive the developmental State in order to ensure human rights.

## **G. Towards transformation: a matrix for breaking the cycle of poverty and inequality and ensuring accountability**

48. The United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Nada al-Nashif, moderated a discussion with the 2019 Martin Ennals Award laureate, Abdul Aziz Muhamat, Senior Research Coordinator in the Social Policy and Development Programme of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Katja Hujo, and the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Mr. De Schutter.

49. Mr. Muhamat lamented the drowning of hundreds of migrants in the seas, the fact that States were blaming one another, and the suffering of the families and friends of the deceased. Poverty and inequalities forced people to leave their countries. Poverty entailed living without one's rights, being marginalized or discriminated against. It affected education and health, especially victimizing children. Unable to afford basic needs, parents faced the choice of selling their children, or sending them abroad. He shared his story, about how inequalities and injustices had torn his country apart and forced millions to seek equality elsewhere through perilous boat journeys. However, equality did not exist in Western countries, as refugees and migrants were mistreated and stigmatized. COVID-19 presented an opportunity to raise awareness of the challenges facing refugees and migrants, but policymakers continued to discriminate between rich and poor, healthy and unhealthy, documented and undocumented migrants and refugees. Describing the deprivation of dignity on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, where detainees were identified by numbers and not names, he appealed for humans never to be treated as statistical data and fed on charity. People, including the poor, should always have voices that participated in decision-making and in the quest for solutions, with roles and responsibilities recognizing their talents and abilities.

50. Ms. Hujo recalled that education and health were important equalizers, while COVID-19 exacerbated inequalities. Public policies were central to fighting poverty and inequalities, and economic and social policies were interlinked. It was essential to bridge the gaps in social protection. Poverty was intrinsically linked to development, and must be central to national and international development strategies. Inequalities should be addressed through comprehensive approaches, attacking asymmetric powers and exclusionary economic and social systems, institutions and policies. Budget and fiscal systems should be progressive and not regressive for poor people. The economy should be designed with less concentration of power and wealth and a stronger State that was able to protect the labour market, create employment, ensure social protection and provide social services. There was a need for transparency in data on inequalities and a better understanding of how the elite influenced policies and politics. Research by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development had revealed that policymakers and businesses were often more conservative than their electorates and customers, and that politicians' decisions were more influenced by the elite than by their constituencies. Research had shown that social movements could be very powerful when building alliances of groups and networks. Such movements needed champions in political systems and links with political institutions and processes, such as parties, trade unions and parliaments, to have an impact. People involved in struggles for gender, racial and economic equality, international organizations, academics, thinkers and artists should be allies in those movements and political processes to ensure their success.

51. Mr. De Schutter argued that over the past 30 years, States had become “de-democratized” and only quasi-sovereign as a result of globalization and the privatization of public services. Their regulatory or budgetary choices were often dictated by their need to reassure international creditors or to create a business-friendly environment to attract investors, which involved lowering the level of taxation, cutting public expenditure and making labour markets more flexible. Accountability to reduce poverty and inequalities and uphold human rights should be placed not only on States but also on other actors, including international financial institutions, multilateral development banks and transnational corporations, which all had a decisive influence on such issues. The poverty matrix developed by the Special Rapporteur showed all combined causes of poverty at different levels, which demonstrated that focusing on post-market solutions was not effective in eradicating poverty. Most efforts to combat poverty sought to compensate for the exclusion that markets produced by a combination of progressive taxation and social policies. Such efforts were commendable, but that approach resulted in the prioritization of economic growth as a tool for poverty eradication, although growth-promoting measures had exclusionary impacts. Furthermore, since poverty-reduction policies were perceived as a transfer of wealth from one group to another, such an approach might not garner support from the middle class. He proposed to focus on pre-market solutions and choices that prevented poverty in the first place, such as inclusive labour market policies. He emphasized the political economy dimensions of poverty and inequalities: questions of power, discourse and alliances. Discourses that perversely blamed poverty on the poor themselves legitimized discrimination against people in poverty, caused people not to take up their rights owing to shame or fear of abuse, and undermined political will for redistribution policies. He called for a new discourse on poverty that valued the knowledge, experience and participation of poor people as vital, and shifted the responsibility for poverty from individuals and families to the whole society. Ultimately, poverty was the price paid for failure to create more inclusive societies.

#### **IV. Conclusions and recommendations**

52. Mr. Purevsuren recalled highlights of the forum. COVID-19 had disproportionately affected people in vulnerable situations, notably women and girls, exacerbated pre-existing poverty and inequalities, and threatened the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Speakers had recommended recognition of access to vaccines as a global public good, wide sharing of health technologies, data and knowledge on vaccines and treatment, and flexibility in trade agreements. They had called for strengthening of public services in education, health, food, water and sanitation in order to better prepare for future shocks. Panellists had stressed the importance of progressive taxation, redistribution and the fight against tax avoidance and evasion. Social protection and a new social contract to provide labour rights and minimum wages would support resilient safety nets. He recalled the poverty matrix, which illustrated interconnected causes of poverty at the local, national and international levels and addressed means of breaking cycles of poverty.

53. Mr. Sadiqov recalled other themes discussed, highlighting that COVID-19 had exposed and exacerbated existing challenges. Bridging the digital divide was crucial to realizing the potential of digital technologies on education, economic activities and access to information, particularly in the context of COVID-19. People living in poverty faced many obstacles in terms of access to public services, including stigmatization, discrimination, and social and institutional abuse. There had been a strong call for international solidarity, especially for the most vulnerable countries, to address the unprecedented crisis. Panellists had encouraged a diversification of production and a strengthening and prioritization of existing structures. Participants had discussed, inter alia, disempowerment, extreme poverty, quality and value of life, lack of housing, health care and education, corruption, intergenerational poverty, cooperation between developing countries, and the task of increasing productive capacities by including women and strengthening social safety nets.

54. The following conclusions and recommendations emerged from the Social Forum, as identified by the Co-Chair-Rapporteurs.

## A. Conclusions

55. Since 2002, the Social Forum had addressed various themes related to combating poverty and inequalities. The 2020 Forum had drawn upon previous Forums and considered new challenges, including those arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

56. In addressing good practices, success stories, lessons learned and current challenges in combating poverty and inequalities, the Forum had been guided by the poverty matrix developed by the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, and contributions from other stakeholders.

57. As reflected in the poverty matrix and the Declaration on the Right to Development, poverty and inequalities derived from multiple, complex and interrelated causes at the local, national and global levels, including macroeconomic policies that undermine human rights and sustainable development.

58. COVID-19 had exacerbated poverty and inequalities, disproportionately affecting the poor, women, girls, children, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, informal workers, racial, ethnic and religious minorities, people of African descent, Dalits, peasants, indigenous peoples, migrants and refugees.

59. Factors that perpetuated poverty and inequalities included structural and systemic discrimination against the poor and marginalized. Inadequate access to food, education, health services and digital technologies for children and youth perpetuated intergenerational poverty. Unpaid or undervalued care work and disproportionately high numbers of women in the informal sector increased the feminization of poverty.

60. The exacerbation of inequalities among countries as a result of COVID-19 had made international cooperation and solidarity urgent and imperative for developing countries, especially the least developed countries, small island developing States, landlocked developing countries and other vulnerable countries, including several middle-income countries.

61. Noting that neoliberal policies, structural adjustment and privatization had undermined States' capacity to deliver public services, which violated minimum core standards, commitment to the principle of non-retrogression and the progressive realization of socioeconomic rights, panellists called for greater policy and fiscal space.

62. States and other actors, including international financial institutions, multilateral development banks and transnational corporations, had an important role to play in securing an enabling international environment. As such, they had an obligation to uphold human rights and contribute to reducing poverty and inequalities.

## B. Recommendations

63. Urgent and bold action was key in the fight against and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and its ripple effects. The response package and related policies should aim at a more resilient, equal and sustainable world with justice in all dimensions, including economic, social, gender, racial, fiscal, redistributive, climate and environmental.

64. Human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development, must be placed at the forefront in building better, fairer and greener societies for present and future generations and provide the basis of a new social contract.

65. Efforts to eradicate poverty should tackle inequalities within and among countries through comprehensive approaches that included all relevant stakeholders. The COVID-19 response should attack asymmetries of power and exclusionary economic and social systems, institutions and policies. Breaking with orthodox policymaking, the economic system must be embedded with broader objectives and guided by human rights.

66. States should have the necessary fiscal and policy space to invest in health systems, education, care work, housing, water, sanitation, electricity, infrastructure and digital resources, supported by targeted public policies and a strong multilateral system.
67. Measures on debt suspension, debt cancellation and liquidity expansion, including through special drawing rights, should be further extended to allow developing countries the fiscal and policy space to deliver on human rights, sustainable development and climate targets. The international community should consider alternatives for the debt architecture, including a debt restructuring mechanism. Private creditors should be included to the extent possible in efforts to address debt sustainability.
68. Productive capacities should be developed through State-led efforts to diversify economies and promote structural transformation, paying special attention to sectors with high productivity, optimizing the use of existing capacities and improving local value chains and economies.
69. Policies to eliminate poverty should include data collection to identify those most in need of assistance and areas to be prioritized, while remaining aware of the dangers of targeting as a source of underinclusion that can undermine wider political support for universal schemes. The policies must be designed to eliminate discrimination, systemic and structural inequalities, and social and institutional abuse of the poor.
70. Civil society and social movements had a pivotal role to play in reducing poverty. Active, free and meaningful participation of poor and marginalized communities should be ensured in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of national and international policies combating poverty.
71. The projection that COVID-19 would further exacerbate child poverty should be addressed with specific plans, including measurable targets and dedicated funds. States should consider linking child protection benefits to wage growth to reduce intergenerational transmission of poverty.
72. In building better, States should promote local, peasant and indigenous food systems and agroecology, allow the participation of small food producers in the formulation of policies and address land concentration through land reform.
73. States should promote a just transition to green and decent jobs, while safeguarding labour rights and standards. They should provide social protection floors, paying particular attention to people in vulnerable situations with no social protection, such as workers in the informal sector and in precarious employment.
74. States should adopt a human rights-based approach to taxation to raise the necessary resources for public investments in basic social services. Measures could include progressive personal and corporate income tax, temporary COVID-19 profit taxes and wealth tax. States must take concrete steps to curb illicit financial flows and tax abuse by transnational corporations, with strengthened international cooperation.
75. The multilateral economic, financial and trade system must be democratized, including by expanding voting rights to developing countries and improving regulations on finance, trade and investment. All stakeholders were encouraged to increase engagement in the United Nations process of financing for development, which provided a forum to advance a more equitable multilateral system.
76. All stakeholders must cooperate to revitalize the agenda on technology transfer and overcome obstacles including the expansion of intellectual property rights, to realize the right to development and sustainable development in agriculture, industry, services and job creation, and to work with the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries.
77. States should enhance North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation and solidarity. Developed countries should increase efforts to achieve the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national income for official development assistance to developing countries and 0.15 to 0.2 per cent to least developed countries.

78. States should ensure universal access to COVID-19 vaccines and treatments as global public goods. All stakeholders should support the waiver of certain provisions of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights in relation to the prevention, containment and treatment of COVID-19.
79. States should remove or refrain from imposing unilateral coercive measures, especially those that aggravated poverty and inequality in targeted countries.
80. International and regional human rights mechanisms should continue to provide States with guidance on addressing poverty and inequalities.
81. International financial institutions, multilateral development banks and transnational corporations should undertake human rights impact assessments and be held accountable for human rights violations.
82. The 2021 Social Forum – to be held on the theme of the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, with a special focus on international cooperation and solidarity and from a human rights perspective – should take account of the issues of poverty and inequalities and the conclusions and recommendations of all previous Forums.

## Annex

### List of participants

#### States Members of the Human Rights Council

Afghanistan; Bahrain; Bangladesh; Brazil; Burkina Faso; Chile; Germany; India; Indonesia; Mexico; Nepal; Pakistan; Philippines; Qatar; Senegal; Slovakia; Ukraine; Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

#### States Members of the United Nations

Albania; Algeria; Armenia; Azerbaijan; Barbados; Belarus; Belgium; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Cabo Verde; China Colombia; Cuba; Djibouti; Egypt; El Salvador; Eswatini; Georgia; Ghana; Greece; Guatemala; Iran (The Islamic Republic of); Iraq; Kazakhstan; Malaysia; Mali; Mongolia; Montenegro; Morocco; Myanmar; North Macedonia; Romania; Russian Federation; Sri Lanka; Switzerland; Thailand; Tunisia.

#### Non-Member States represented by observers

State of Palestine; Holy See.

#### United Nations

International Labour Organization (ILO); International Trade Centre (ITC); Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UN-AIDS); Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD); United Nations Development Cooperation Office (UNDCO); United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-WOMEN); United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG); United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD); World Food Programme (WFP); World Health Organization (WHO); World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

#### United Nations Human Rights Mechanisms

Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights; Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development; Independent Expert on the effects of foreign debt and other related international financial obligations of States on the full enjoyment of all human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights; Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia; Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights; Special Rapporteur on the right to development; Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of the unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights.

#### Intergovernmental organizations

Council of Europe; European Union; Non-Aligned Movement; Organization of Islamic Cooperation; South Centre; World Bank.

#### National Human Rights Institutions and Children's Commissioner

Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland; Children's Commissioner, New Zealand; European Network of National Human Rights Institution; Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights of Hungary; the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights – Ombudsman of Ukraine.

#### Academic institutions

Centre d'Etudes Diplomatiques et Stratégiques; Centre interfacultaire en droits de l'enfant-Université de Genève; Federal University of Bahia; Franklin University Switzerland; Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights; Geneva School of

Diplomacy; Georgian Technical University; Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies; Harvard College; Istanbul International Community School; Kinnaird College for Women; Paris School of Economics, Sciences Po; McMaster University; School of Oriental and African Studies-University of London; Swansea University; Universidade Paulista; University for Peace; University of Canberra; University of Glasgow; University of Manouba; University of Stirling; University of Zurich; Willy Brandt School of Public Policy.

### **Non-governmental organizations and others**

Abibimman Foundation; Access Now; Act For Involvement (AFI); Action Against Hunger; Action of Human Movement (AHM); Action on Smoking and Health; Africa Culture Internationale Human Rights; Action pour le développement du Sahel (ADESA); AFEDESE; African Artists for Development; Agence internationale pour le développement; Alliance Globale contre les Mutilations Génitales Féminines; Alsalam Foundation; Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain Inc; Angu de Grilo; Arab Center for the Independence of the Judiciary and the Legal Profession (ACIJLP); Ariana Municipality, Tunisia; Articulação negra de Pernambuco; Asabe Shehu Yar Adua Foundation; Asociación Internacional de Derechos Humanos y Desarrollo Social; Association canadienne pour le droit et la vérité; Association “Paix” pour la lutte contre la Contrainte et l’injustice; Association for the Human Rights of the Azerbaijani people in Iran (AHRAZ) (Norway); Association internationale des étudiants en sciences économiques et commerciales (AIESEC)-Milano; Association mauritanienne pour la promotion des droits de l’homme; Association nationale de promotion et de protection des droits de l’homme; Association nationale des partenaires migrants; Association of World Citizens; Association pour les Victimes Du Monde; Association Projet Démocratique du Kurdistan Iranien (PDKI); Association promotion droits humains; Association Thendral; Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII; ATD Fourth World; ATD Senegal; Baha’i International Community; Bir Dünya Çocuk Derneği; Building Resources Across Communities (BRAC); Capoeira4Refugees; Center for International Law; Centre de Formations Etudes et Recherches pour le Développement; Centre Europe-tiers monde (CETIM); Centre for Gender Justice and Women Empowerment; Centre for legal aid assistance and settlement; Centre Independent de Recherches et d’Initiatives pour le Dialogue (CIRID); Centre Zagros pour les Droits de l’Homme; China South Industries Group; Club Ohada Thies (COT); Comissão de Igualdade Racial da Ordem dos Advogados do Brasil/Amazonas (COIR OAB/AM); Confederação Nacional de Agricultores Familiares e Empreendedores Familiares Rurais (CONAFER); Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd; Congregations of St. Joseph; Consolata Institute; Consortium for Street Children; Construisons Ensemble Le Monde; Convention pour le bien être social; Coppieters Foundation; Development Pathways; Corporación Centro de Estudios de Derecho, Justicia y Sociedad; Dignity Forum Australia Inc.; Dirigentes de mi Comunidad (DICOMU); En Vero; Fondation d’Auteuil; Fondation des Oeuvres pour la Solidarité et le Bien Etre Social (FOSBES ONG); Fondation des œuvres pour la solidarité et le bien être social; FoodFirst Informations and Action-Network (FIAN) International; Fundació Josep Irla; Fundación Abba Colombia; Fundación Cepaim, Acción Integral con Migrantes; Fundación para la Democracia Internacional; Geneva International Model United Nations (GIMUN); Genève pour les droits de l’homme: formation international; Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; GloboNews; Golden Crown Group Canada Inc., Universität Rostock; Green Jobs & Sustainable Development International Centre (GJASD International); Graduate Women International (GWI); Grameen Foundation India; Human Rights Commission-City of Tucson – USA; Human Rights Law Centre; IBON International Foundation Inc.; Initiative d’opposition contre les discours extrémistes; Initiative for Social and Economic Rights; Institute for Economic Justice; Instituto de Estudos Previdenciários (IEPREV); International Association of Human Rights and Social Development (AIDHES); International Council of Women; International Federation of Associations of the Elderly; International Federation of Social Workers; International Federation on Ageing; International Human Rights Association of American Minorities (IHRAAM); International Human Rights Council; International Human Rights Internship Program; International Movement for Advancement of Education Culture Social & Economic Development (IMAECSED); International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse; International Organization for the Right to Education and Freedom of Education (OIDEEL); International Organizations of

Parliamentarians; International Relations Students' Association of McGill University; International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC); International Youth and Student Movement for the United Nations; Just Fair; Labour collective LLC Baykal777; Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada; Legal Resources Centre; Maarij Foundation for Peace and Development; Make Mothers Matter; Maloca Internationale; Medicus Mundi Switzerland; MenschenrechtsVerein für politisch Verfolgte e.V.; MINBYUN-Lawyers for a Democratic Society; MJ Law firm; Mongolian Women's Employment Support Federation; Mothers Legacy Project; Musique Universelle Arc en Ciel; National Agency for the Control of AIDS, Nigeria; Noorena Shams foundation; Norwegian Church Aid; Nouvara Arris; O Globo newspaper; Oanda consulting, Nigeria; Ohaha Family Foundation; Organisation Camerounaise de Promotion de la Coopération Économique Internationale (OCAPROCE); Organisation Mondiale des Associations pour l'Éducation Prénatale (OMAEP); Oxfam America; Patriotic Vision Organization in Lebanon; P'la Arte; Prime Solicitors United Kingdom; Promotion du Développement Economique et Social (PDES); Radio CBN; Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary; Réseau d'engagement et de soutien aux organisations de femmes (RESO-Femmes) International; Réseau Unité pour le Développement de Mauritanie; Roma future; Rural Aid Pakistan; Save the Children International; SchweryCade; Shah Maqem Trust; Sindhuli Plus; Society for International Development (SID); Soka Gakkai International; Sovereign Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem (OSMTH); Swiss Indigenous Network; Tandem Project; Thalassaemia International Federation Limited (TIF); The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Foundation Inc.; The Consortium for Street Children; The Tokyo Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games; Third World Network (TWN); Union of European Football Associations (UEFA); Ukrainian choice-the Right of the people; Union des nations pour l'enseignement, la science universelle et les droits de l'homme (UNESU); Uramba Colombia; Voie éclairée des enfants démunis (VED); Western Sahara Campaign UK; Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC), Kathmandu, Nepal; Women's World Summit Foundation; World Association for the School as an Instrument of Peace; World Inequality Database; World Inequality Lab; World Organization of the Scout Movement; World Social Forum on Health and Social Security; World Welfare Association; Youth For Human Rights International; Yunus Sports Hub.

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